

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks at the Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride Opening Ceremony
April 16, 2015

The President. Thank you. Good morning, everybody. What a gorgeous day! I will just point out, it is always beautiful at this particular event. It is gorgeous every single day. And I want to thank Vice President Biden and VA Secretary Bob McDonald for being here.

This is the sixth time that we've welcomed the Soldier Ride to the White House. This is one of our favorite events every single year. You all know the story. Over 10 years ago, a young Long Island bartender, a civilian named Chris Carney, dreamed up the idea of biking coast to coast to raise money and support for our wounded warriors. And back then, he probably would not have predicted how far the Soldier Ride would go, how thousands of Americans would join the cause, how a nation would be inspired by all of you.

We've got a number of folks here who are currently serving or have served in uniform. We've got Army.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. We've got Navy.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Air Force.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. We've got Marines.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. And we've got some Coast Guard.

Audience member. Yeah! [*Laughter*]

The President. That's it, man. [*Laughter*]

We've got some extraordinary military families who support you every single mile. So we are among heroes here today. All the riders, I just had a chance to say hi to them, and they look great. Don't get too comfortable though. You've got a lot of miles ahead. This is just a pit stop so we can all cheer you on.

Just to give you a—some sense of who these riders are, we've got heroes like Sergeant William Armstrong. Where's William? There he is in the back. William was 24 years old and serving in Afghanistan when a roadside bomb tore the ligaments in his knee and broke the bones in his leg. As a lifelong distance runner, he was devastated that he might never run again. But he didn't give up. His caretakers at Walter Reed got him a bike so he could get into shape. After a lot of surgeries, months of physical therapy, 2 weeks ago, William ran a marathon.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. Incredible.

The President. And I want to quote what William said here. He said, "This Army put me back together," he says. But it was being "with people with similar life experiences . . . that exhilarated and motivated me." Thank you, William, for your incredible service.

We've got Specialist Teresa Ann Jackson. Where's Teresa? There she is right there. Two years ago, while serving as a medic at Fort Campbell, Teresa fell ill with a rare disease that affected her arteries. Doctors had to amputate both her feet. She remembers the shock and isolation she and her husband felt afterwards. And it—again, I want to quote her. "I wasn't expecting to be in a wheelchair at 30," she says. And at first, her—at her first Wounded Warrior event, she found a community of people who welcomed her, who understood what she was going through, who continue to support her today through her recovery. And today, Teresa wants to study to be a social worker so that she can give back to others. Teresa, we thank you for—[applause].

And we've got Captain Vincent Cerchione. Where's Vincent? There he is right there. In 2003, Vincent led a dozen soldiers of the Third Infantry Division into battle in Iraq, taking rocket fire on a daily basis. He served two tours there and then came home with the kind of wound you can't always see: posttraumatic stress. But with courage and the support of his wife, Vincent reached out for help, which is what we want all of our warriors to do. He says that when he found the Wounded Warrior Project—and I'm quoting here—"It was the first time since I returned that I'd ever talked to anybody and felt like I wasn't alone." Vincent, you are never alone. And because of your service, we also know that we are never alone and we're always safe. Thank you so much for everything you've done.

So that's what these riders represent here today, that sense of community and support and love for each other. And that's what binds everyone who serves proudly under our flag and all the Americans who cheer you on. It's our chance to say to all our returning heroes that you're not alone, that we've got your back, we're going to be with you every step of the way. We will be with you all that long journey that it often takes to recover every single mile.

You and all the men and women of our Armed Forces represent what's best in America. And for me and Michelle and the girls, for Joe Biden and Jill, and I know Bob and his family, time with you has been some of the most inspiring parts of our jobs. We could not be prouder of you or more grateful to you and your families for everything you've done to protect our freedom.

And that's why, as Commander in Chief, I'm going to keep doing everything in my power to make sure that we serve you as well as you serve us. That means getting you the care and benefits that you deserve and have earned, including wounds like traumatic brain injury and posttraumatic stress. It means making sure our veterans have the education and the jobs and opportunities that you have to have in order to get your shot at the American Dream that you helped to defend. It means recognizing and supporting the incredible families and caregivers who sacrifice so much. They serve as well. We've got to be there for those families.

So I want to encourage every American along the route to get out and cheer for these men and women. And I want all of our riders—and all those that you're riding for, including some who were left behind on the field of battle—we want all of you to know that we're not just going to be with you for 3 days and these 60 miles. As a nation, as Americans grateful for your sacrifices, we're going to be with you on all the roads of your life ahead.

So God bless you and your families, all who serve. God bless America. With that, I'm going to do my favorite part, which is blow the horn. [Laughter] Let's get this ride started.

[At this point, the President was given an air horn by a member of his staff.]

The President. Ya'll ready?

Audience members. America!

The President. America! [*Laughter*] Okay. On your marks! Get set!

[*The President sounded the horn, and the ride began.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:24 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Amber Cerchione, wife of Vincent Cerchione, an Army veteran who suffered posttraumatic stress from a rocket attack in Iraq in 2003; and Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

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